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Front Page
Edit Page
Other Page

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Policy Making Arm?

Truman Says CIA Was Diverted From Its Original Assignment

By HARRY S. TRUMAN
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INDEPENDENCE, Mo. (NANA)—I think it has become necessary to take another look at the purpose and operations of our Central Intelligence—CIA. At least, I would like to submit here the original reason why I thought it necessary to organize this agency during my administration, what I expected it to do and how it was to operate as an arm of the President.

I think it is fairly obvious that by and large a President's performance in office is as effective as the information he has and the information he gets. That is to say, that assuming the President himself possesses a knowledge of our history, a sensitive understanding of our institutions, and an insight into the needs and aspirations of the people, he needs to have available to him the most accurate and up to the minute information on what is going on everywhere in the world, and particularly of the trends and developments in all the danger spots in the contest between East and West. This is an immense task and requires a special kind of an intelligence facility.

Of course, every President has available to him all the information gathered by the many intelligence agencies already in existence. Departments of State, Defense, Commerce Interior and others are constantly engaged in extensive information gathering and have done excellent work. But their collective information reached the President all too frequently in conflicting conclusions. At times the intelligence reports tended to be slanted to conform to established positions of a given department. This becomes confusing and what's worse, such intelligence is of little use to a President in reaching the right decisions.

Cause of Pearl Harbor

I have seen instances where the Army, Navy and the State Department were duplicating their intelligence coverage which resulted in inaccurate conclusions. I have always felt that the Pearl Harbor disaster was partly the result of that kind of intelligence confusion. It seems to me that much of the intelligence gathered failed to reach the top levels in the government, and that when it did, it was often in a form that was not helpful.

It was my feeling that the critical times when the intelligence of information came too late, thus preventing the adoption of course of action necessary to protect our security. In this new kind of world in which the United States occupies a position of leadership among the free nations, faulty information, careless intelligence or unintelligent reports on intelligence, or unintelligent conclusions, can prove very damaging to our policy-making decisions and to the conduct of foreign relations which is the personal responsibility of the President.

Therefore, I decided to set up a special organization charged with the collection of all intelligence reports from every available source and to have those reports reach me as President without departmental "treatment" of interpretations. I wanted and needed the information in its "natural raw" state and in as comprehensive a volume as it was practical for me to make full use of it. But the most important thing about this move was to guard against the chance of intelligence being used to influence or to lead the President into unwise decisions and I thought it was necessary that the President do his own thinking and evaluating. Since President into unwise decisions making was his—then he had to be sure that no information is kept from him for whatever reason at the discretion of any one department or agency, or that unpleasant facts be kept from him. There are always those who would want to shield a President from bad news or misjudgments to spare him from being "upset."

Men of Integrity

Now, this at best was a most difficult requirement to meet, and the only thing I could think of that would give it some reasonable assurances of success is that the people placed in charge of the highest integrity and

would possess the capacity to work on the highest level of government responsibility and to have no involvements of any kind of partisan politics.

I wanted to make sure that CIA was not to be another overlapping facility. Quite to the contrary — it was intended to prevent it. As I visualized it, it was to coordinate and consolidate the flow of information so that it would reach the President with no intervening steps in that process. It was to be directly under the President and solely responsible to the President.

In this way, the Central Intelligence Agency would function as a source of continuing vital information, unedited and uninterpreted for the use of the President, thus enabling him to be informed on everything current and without the usual procedural delays.

No President has the right to abdicate his responsibility for administering the operations of the Executive Branch of the government. He can delegate but he cannot escape the personal responsibility for anything that may go wrong. If there is any West, the best thing we needed was for the CIA to be seized by the kind of unremitting drudgery of never ending homework of the Presidency of the United States.

It is not only the loneliest job, but it is one of continual soulsearching and of deep and sustained thought. A President is in the grip of events that never seem to let go. He is in every sense the captor of the most exacting office in the gift of a free people. But with all that, it is a wonderful and indescribable experience. It is exasperating and it is exhilarating. It is a moment in history that enables a man to serve mankind in a broad and comprehensive way and to shape the course of the world towards a happier existence and its hope for a life in peace.

CIA "Diverted"

For some time I have been disturbed by the way the CIA has been diverted from its original assignment. It has become an operational and at times a policy-making arm of the government. This has led to trouble and difficulties in our

areas. I never had any thought that when I set up the CIA that it would be injected into peace-time cloak and dagger operations. Some of the complications and embarrassment that I think we have experienced are in part attributable to the fact that this quiet intelligence arm of the President has been so removed from its intended role that it is being interpreted as a symbol of sinister and mysterious foreign intrigue — and a subject for cold war enemy propaganda.

With all the nonsense put out about "Yankee imperialism," "exploitive capitalism," "war-mongering," "monopolists," in their name calling assault on the CIA, the best thing we needed was for the CIA to be seized upon as something akin to a subverting influence in the affairs of other people.

I well know the first temporary Director of the CIA, Admiral Sowers, and the later permanent Directors of the CIA, General Hoyt Vandenberg and Allen Dulles. These were men of the highest character, patriotism and integrity — and I assure you this is true of all those who continue in charge.

But, there are now some searching questions that need to be answered. I, therefore, would like to see the CIA be restored to its original assignment as the intelligence arm of the President, and that whatever else it can properly perform in that special field — and that its operational duties be terminated or properly used elsewhere.

We have grown up as a nation, respected for our free institutions and for our ability to maintain a free and open society. There is something about the way the CIA has been functioning that is casting a shadow over our historic position and I need to correct it.

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